

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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November 1, 2001

The Hon. Spencer Abraham
Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy
James Forrestal Building
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to urge you to begin sending a representative to the international discussions regarding the International Thermonuclear Energy Reactor (ITER), which, as you know, is a major fusion research initiative. The next set of discussions will be held in Toronto on November 8 and 9. While it may be too late to have a U.S. representative attend that session, the U.S. should send a representative, at least as an observer, to the follow-up meeting, now scheduled for Tokyo in December.

The current ITER proposal merits consideration. It is a far cry from the original ITER program, which collapsed under the weight of its projected cost, despite international interest from the European Community, Russia, Japan and the United States. The current ITER initiative is based on a design that is half the cost, or less, than the original. The burning plasma experiment that would be conducted at ITER is the next logical step toward understanding the physics of fusion reactors.

While we are not ready to offer our unqualified support for this initiative, we do believe exploring the current ITER option makes sense. In fact, H.R. 4, the "Securing America's Future Energy Act of 2001," explicitly authorizes you to examine the option of participating in an international burning plasma experiment (Title V, section 2503). (The bill passed the Committee by voice vote, and passed the House by a substantial margin.)

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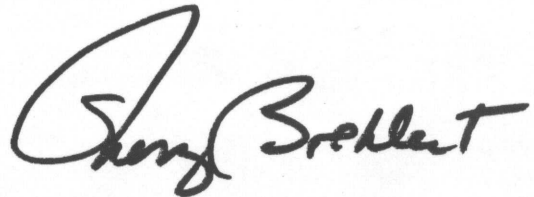
Obviously, time is of the essence with the ITER initiative, and the U.S. should begin to assess the project's feasibility, evaluate what role the U.S. might play in it, and participate in discussions to refine the project and select a site. We have been approached by both the Japanese and Canadian governments about this matter, and they are eager to have the U.S. join the discussions. If we do not begin to examine ITER soon, we may lose the chance to join as a partner.

We look forward to hearing from you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ralph Hall".

RALPH HALL
Ranking Minority Member

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sherwood Boehlert".

SHERWOOD BOEHLERT
Chairman

SB:djg/dp